

## **WIND FARM GOES LIVE**

*By Karl Puckett*

The first phase of a \$500 million wind farm south of Ethridge and 85 miles north of Great Falls is finished and on the electrical grid, with the power bound for California.

"It's probably the most important thing that's happened in northcentral Montana in quite a while," Toole County Commissioner Allan Underdal said. "It means a lot of tax base for our county."

The Glacier Wind Farm, where construction began six months ago in April, will generate about \$1.6 million in property taxes for the state, schools and Toole County in 2009 and 12 to 15 permanent jobs, he said.

The first phase features 71 250-foot-tall turbines that will produce 106.5 megawatts of power.

"We couldn't be happier," Bill Alexander of Spain-based developer NaturEner said.

The wind farm connected to the transmission system Wednesday, said Claudia Rapkoch of NorthWestern Energy, which owns the transmission line that will ship the power to market.

"Why not produce it in the state of Montana?" Rapkoch said.

San Diego Gas and Electric, an investor-owned utility in California serving 1.2 million customers, is buying the electricity.

Each of the towers is scheduled to be online and producing full power within two weeks, Alexander said.

NaturEner is adding 20 megawatts at a time to the NorthWestern Energy transmission system, he said.

The process of connecting the turbines to the electrical circuit began two weeks ago, but until this week electricity had been flowing only into the turbines, Alexander said.

"Now, starting this week, we're going to let the turbines start turning so they generate electricity back into the electrical system," Alexander said.

NaturEner intentionally delayed the delivery of 69 additional wind turbines for the 103.5-megawatt second phase until Congress extended a wind energy production tax credit, Alexander said.

With approval of the tax break Oct. 3 as part of the \$700 billion bailout legislation for the financial industry, the second phase is back on track. It is scheduled to be finished early in the second quarter of 2009. The second phase stretches into Glacier County.

"We're going to go ahead and arrange for the delivery of those turbines," Alexander said.

The turbines are being manufactured in Iowa at a facility owned by Spain-based Acciona.

Workers already have installed the concrete foundations for the second phase.

The first and second phases will total 140 turbines and 210 megawatts, which will be larger than the 90-turbine, 135-megawatt Judith Gap wind farm.

Glacier Wind Farm is NaturEner's first wind farm in North America. It has developed 14 in Spain since 1999.

When the company broke ground July 17, Jose Maria Sanchez Seara, the CEO of NaturEner USA, said it planned to build an additional 300 to 500 megawatts of wind farm power in Montana alone over the next two years, apart from the Glacier project.

"This is just the beginning, we think, of this kind of energy, so we're excited to see what happens here," Underdal said.

A proposed transmission line between Great Falls and Lethbridge, Alberta, called the Montana Alberta Tie Line, could spur additional development, he said.

At the end of 2007, Montana ranked fifth in wind energy potential, but its 164 megawatts of installed wind power was 16th, compared with No. 1 Texas, with 4,356 megawatts, and 16,818 megawatts installed nationwide.

One megawatt is enough to power 250 to 300 homes.